

## DOMINANCE IN DOGS

"Just like people, dogs have individual personalities and traits. Certain breeds tend to produce dominant personality types {such as Chows, Lhasa Apsos and many of the terrier breeds} Within each litter of puppies there is also a variety of personality types-from dominant to submissive. If you are adopting a dog that exhibits a dominant, assertive personality, the following information will be helpful in establishing your new relationship.

### **Traits of a dominant, assertive dog:**

1} Dominant assertive dogs think of themselves as the leader in your family or "pack". This is natural for the dog but sometimes it is difficult for the human to understand. These dogs are often ready to challenge for the right to lead. Once allowed to become the leader, the dog may be willing to fight to retain the position.

2} Dominant dogs do not, as a rule, do well around children. They will not tolerate the quick movements and unpredictable handling typical of children. Unless you are there to carefully supervise, do not allow these dogs to be around children.

3} Dominant dogs may be small or large. A small dog with an assertive personality can be just as possessive, protective and pushy as any large dog of the same temperament. Do not tolerate aggressive behavior from either of them. Small or large, a growl or snap is likely to lead to a bite. Small or large, dogs that bite are dangerous.

4} Dominant dogs may be subtle in their manipulation of you. When you stop stroking the dog, he may nudge you to continue. If you resume the stroking in response to the nudging, he has successfully trained you to treat him as the leader. Assertive dogs take compliance to mean they have the right to make you obey them. They nudge, you stroke, they growl, you resume stroking. It is then a small step from this to growling at you when you try to make them get off the couch, followed by snapping when you insist they obey.

"Living with a dominant assertive dog: Does this mean you can't let your dog sleep on the couch or have him in your lap when you stroke him? No; it just means you need to be very aware of how the dog is interpreting your actions. You need to learn the dog's language. You also need to learn about leadership, so that you can be in charge instead of a dog calling the shots, if you are in charge, you have the right to allow the dog on the couch and also to make him get off the couch when you want. If you are not willing to be an assertive leader, do not adopt a dog with this personality type. Both you and the dog will be happier if you select a more submissive dog. Two things help make a positive relationship with a dominant dog. The first is obedience training and the second is to establish yourself as the pack leader. " Establishing oneself as a pack leader to be followed.

### **Dominance and Principles Behind It**

For obedience training to proceed smoothly, your dog must consider you its alpha leader. This means that it considers YOU the boss. There are a number of exercises you can do to establish and maintain dominance over your dog. Individual dogs vary in submissiveness. If your dog is very submissive, you don't need to worry about establishing dominance (in fact, you may need to tone down your own dominating behavior to help bolster its confidence). Most dogs are happy to be submissive: just be sure to show approval at the occasional signs of submission, and assert dominance if it tries to test you (most dogs will, in adolescence). A very few dogs may be dominant and continually challenge you for dominance, in which case you will actively need to assert and establish your position.

More often, people will misinterpret adolescent high energy or bratty behavior as ploys for dominance when they are not. Think of a two-year-old human child testing her parents. She's finding out what the limits are rather than actually "challenging" her parents for leadership. Puppies and young dogs do exactly the same thing. Correct them firmly, but don't go into an all out "dominance battle" when not appropriate. Returning to the toddler analogy, the most you might do is a sharp "No-Sit", or a cuff up under the chin then a No-sit. You would not pick her up, hold her against the wall and scream at her. Remember that most dogs are still "young". Only apply additional pressure or corrections as they grow or are older and do it along with supervision.

### **Never mistake being alpha with punishment**

An alpha leader is fair. An alpha leader deserves its position. An alpha leader does not use fear, punishment or brute force to achieve and maintain its position. An alpha leader, instead, makes it crystal clear what behaviors it approves of and which it does not. An alpha leader expects its subordinates to follow its lead; it does not force them to. If you

get mad at your dog, or angry or furious, you've lost the alpha position. Dogs do not understand fury. You have to be calm and focused. You must teach them the command and show them what you want, and then expect that from them. Always show approval at signs of submission. Praise your dog when it drops its eyes first. Praise it when it licks you under the chin. Give it an enthusiastic tummy rub when it rolls over on its back. Be consistent and fair in your corrections. You must demonstrate to your dog that it can trust your orders. Do not ever correct the dog after the fact. Such corrections appear to be arbitrary and unfair to the dog, because it has no associative memory the way people do. If your dog is still a puppy, socializing it is a good way to gain its trust. If you decide that some action requires correction, \*always\* give a correction when you see that action. For example, if you decide that your dog is not allowed on the sofa, then \*always\* correct it when you see it on the sofa. Consistency can be a big challenge with a family. Every family member must agree on the basic ground rules with the dog; when and for what it should be corrected, what commands to use and so on. Families must cooperate extensively to avoid confusing the dog. It is best if only one person "actively" trains the dog but all must participate; thereafter if the commands are given the same way, everyone in the family can use them.

Finally, always use the minimum correction necessary. If a sharp AH-AH will do, use that rather than an alpha roll. If a pop under the chin will do, use that rather than a scruff shake.

### **Correct the dog's challenges**

Especially during adolescence, your dog may test and/or challenge your position. Do not neglect to correct this behavior. You don't need to come down like a ton of bricks; just making it clear you don't tolerate the behavior is sufficient. For example, don't let your dog crowd you through the door, don't let him jump out of the car until you've given him permission, don't let him jump for food in your hand. Don't let him ignore commands that he knows.

### **Learn how to display alpha behavior**

You may not need to use all of these, but you should be familiar with them. They are listed in "escalating" order. Do not use any of these if you are angry or upset. The point is never to hurt the dog, but to show it who is alpha. They work best if you are calm, firm, and matter of fact. Again, always use the minimum correction necessary.

More important than knowing how to perform an alpha roll is learning to play the alpha role. That means having the attitude of "I-am-always-right-and-I-will-never-let-my-dog-willfully-disobey-me" without ever becoming angry or giving up. Picture a small two-year old toddler. You're not in a struggle over who's "Mom" but over what the child is allowed to do, and there's a crucial difference in the two.

Using an alpha roll on a dog that is already submissive but disobeys because it doesn't know what is expected of it is **destructive** to the relationship between you and the dog. Likewise, using an alpha role on a dominant dog but not using any other positive reinforcements can alienate it. Most dogs never need to be alpha rolled in their lives. Furthermore, alpha rolls are one of the strongest weapons in dominance arsenal. Save it for the gravest of infractions.

Being dominant is no substitute for learning to read and understand your dog. Proper obedience (which should be a part of any dog's life, even when "only" a pet) is a two way street and requires you to be as responsible to your dog as your dog is responsive to you.

### **There are a number of ways in demonstrating dominance:**

**Timeouts:** put the dog on a down stay or if not yet trained to do so, lay the dog on its back and hold it there for a while once the dog stops struggling you can then let it up. This is often surprisingly effective, since dogs are such social creatures. (I don't prefer this with Chesapeakes but is fine for Labradors)

**Eye contact:** alphas "stare down" subordinates. If your dog does not back down in a stare contest, start a verbal correction. As soon as it backs down, praise it.

**Taps under the chin:** alpha dogs nip subordinates under the chin as corrections. You can use this by tapping your dog under the chin with your fingers. Don't tap on top of the muzzle, not only can you risk injuring your dog's sense of smell, you may make him hand-shy.

**Grabbing under the ears:** alpha dogs will chomp under subordinate dogs' ears and shake. You can mimic this by holding the skin under your dog's ears firmly and shaking. Again, do not use excessive force. Do this just enough to get the point across. DO NOT grab the top of the neck and shake. You may injure your dog this way.

**Alpha Roll:** *Pin the dog to ground on its side with feet away from you. Hold scruff/collar with one hand to pin head down (gently but firmly) with the other hand on hip/groin area (groin area contact will tend to cause the dog to submit to you.) This usually is Not recommended.*

### **Insist on certain behaviors**

Feed your dog after your own dinner. Make him lay down while you are eating rather than beg at your lap. Don't let it crowd through a doorway ahead of you. Don't let it hop out of the car until you say OK. There are a variety of small things you can do that assert your dominance in a non-traumatic way. If you're clever about it, you can use them to get a well-behaved dog (one that doesn't shoot out of the front door or scramble out of the car or beg at the table). In particular, putting a behavior that the dog wants to do on hold until you say OK is a very good way to be the alpha and keep the dog well behaved.

### **Make sure your dog obeys everyone in your family**

This is a fairly important point. If your dog seems to have trouble obeying a particular family member, you must make sure it does so, by always backing up the family member when he or she tells the dog to do something. If the family member seems to be afraid of the dog, or is very young, then you should supervise all interaction until the problem is resolved.

*(For adults to use in advanced socializing and training)*

### **Aggression with other Dogs**

Dogs can be aggressive with other dogs, especially if they have not been properly socialized with other dogs in puppy-hood. Sometimes a dog that is naturally dominant has trouble with other dogs especially in puberty. Sometimes a dog has a specific experience (e.g. a dogfight with another aggressive dog) that causes it to become aggressive toward other dogs in general as well. Whatever the reason, it is well worth your time working on your dog's aggression toward other dogs. You will probably get the best results, especially with a problem dog -- extreme aggression, for example -- if you contact a local trainer (preferably one that specializes in problem dogs) for individual help. However, there are some common-sense things you can do.

First, a bit of basic dog psychology: friendly behaviors include moving side by side, sniffing butts, tails wagging at body level (not up high or over the back). Not-friendly behaviors include meeting face-to-face when approaching, ears forward and tail over back.

Force them into friendly behaviors as follows: walk the dogs in parallel on leash. They should be close enough to see each other but not close enough to snap at or touch each other. Be careful when you two turn that the dogs don't tangle. Make sure one doesn't get ahead of the other: keep them parallel. Keep this up until they relax. Slowly start walking closer together as behavior permits.

Hold one dog on leash in a sit. Have food treats and a water bottle handy. Walk the other dog toward it, to about six feet, and then turn away (increase the distance if the sitting dog snarls). The idea is to turn away \*before\* the sitting dog shows any aggression. If the dog shows no aggression, reward it with a food tidbit or verbal praise. Do NOT touch the dog (stand on the leash or tie it down). If it does growl, spray it with water. Switch the dogs so that each experiences sitting or walking toward. They are learning that good things happen without defensive behavior. As they improve, start walking a bit closer before turning. If the sitting dog snarls, do NOT turn the other dog away: the person with the sitting dog should correct it and when the dog subsides, THEN the moving dog should turn away.

Finally, holding the head of one dog, but allowing it to stand, have the other dog investigate its rear briefly. This is really the extreme extension of the above. These exercises have several purposes. One is to force the dogs to consider themselves friendly by engaging in the behavior of friendly dogs. The other is to teach both dogs that an approaching dog is not necessarily grounds for aggression.

This will take a lot of work, probably over a couple of months, but they will work, and what's more, should reduce tensions with other dogs as well (i.e., not only between the two specific dogs in the exercises).